

THE BAT-LAD OF READING
GAOL 42

So, like things of stone in a valley lone,
Quiet we sat and dumb:
But each man's heart beat thick and
quick,
Like a madman on a drum!

With sudden shock the prison-clock
Smote on the shivering air,
And from all the gaol rose up a wail
Of impotent despair,
Like the sound that flightened marshes
hear
From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most fearful things
In the crystal of a dream,
We saw the greasy hempen rope
Hooked to the blackened beam,
And heard the prayer the hangman's
snare
Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so
That he gave that bitter cry,
And the wild regrets., and the bloody
sweats,
None knew so well as I:
For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.

IV

THERE is no chapel on the day
On which they hang a man:
The Chaplain's heart is far too sick,
Or his face is far too wan,
Or there is that written in his eyes
Which none should look upon.

So they kept us close till nigh on
noon,
And then they rang the bell,
And the Warders with their jingling
keys
Opened each listening cell,
And down the iron stair we tramped,
Each from his separate Hell.